

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Women in Labor Unions

Personal Experience

O H 1865

CHARMAINE EVANS

Interviewed

by

Holly Hanni

on

May 9, 1997

CHARMAINE EVANS

Mrs Charmaine Evans was born in Youngstown, Ohio on May 20, 1953. She is the youngest of twelve children. Charmaine enjoyed school and became involved in an organization called Associated Neighborhood. This organization helped Charmaine get hired by St. Elizabeth's Hospital when she was sixteen. After she graduated from Rayen High School in 1971, Charmaine went to work for Associated Neighborhood and Sears. Then in 1978, she was hired at General Motors in Lordstown. Charmaine has encountered problems of racism and sexism over the years with her fellow co-workers.

Charmaine became active with her Local 1112 and is on the Women's Committee. Recently, Charmaine was elected onto the Elections Committee and is currently involved in a suit over the matter. She feels that there has been a lot of injustice in her local in the past, but is hopeful because there is a newly elected president. Charmaine was married in 1989 to a fellow co-worker. Her husband, Jit, helps with the household responsibilities and in raising their twelve year old daughter. Charmaine brings her daughter to a lot of the Women's Committee meetings and events. She wants her daughter to know about her union involvement. Charmaine has done a variety of jobs while at Lordstown. She fights for her rights as a female employee. She feels that women need to be strong and fight for what is right, either at work or within the union.

-- Holly Hanni

H This is an interview with Charmaine Evans for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Women in Labor Unions, by Holly Hanni, on May 9, 1997, in the fifth floor conference room in DeBartolo Hall on the Youngstown State University campus

I see from your sheet that you were born in Youngstown. Can you tell me what it was like to grow up in Youngstown, Ohio?

E An experience. I was sort of a child that stayed to myself for a long time, until my mother just pushed me out of the house. And then it got to be I was a loner. I went everywhere by myself. I always started off by myself. But then after I started, you know, mingling with people, I sort of liked it. So, I just became more outgoing.

H You were shy, then.

E Yeah, in the beginning, because they used to call me little nicknames and stuff. It made me, you know, sort of go back into a shell. But I slowly came out, you know, because I am a Taurus, and the bull started coming out. So it came out of me later in life, after I got to about the sixth grade, sixth or seventh grade. The shiner started coming out.

H. You lived on the North side. What was the North side like?

E Well, where I stayed at, there was never any kids around me, so I used to always have to walk down to the projects and back then. It was a nice little neighborhood. And I used to go up there and I had some girl friends and I used to go over to their house. We all went to school together, so then we found jobs together. We used to do after school jobs.

H While you were in high school?

E Right. When we got to junior high school, we had a lady that we met her in school, and they took us down to the North Side Action Center -- that is what it was called then -- and they found us after school jobs where we would work for two hours after we got out of school. We would walk down to St. Elizabeth's Hospital. I worked in dietary. It was me and all the little girls I grew up with and stayed down in the projects with. If it was at night when we got off, they would pick us up and take us home. They were really nice women. And we got home real good. So, it gave me the work experience.

H How long did you do that for?

E I worked at St Elizabeth's for two years. And then during the summer we would work full-time

H At St Elizabeth's?

E Yeah. We worked full-time at St Elizabeth's and then during the school year we would only work ten hours a week. When we was part-time -- well it seemed like full-time to me then -- we would work like five hours, or four to six hours, or something like that, during the week. It was twenty-four to thirty hours a week. It was full-time, but it was not really forty hours. But, it gave us pocket money, you know, because my mother had a lot of kids, so that way I was able to have my own money.

H How many brothers and sisters do you have?

E I have seven sisters and three brothers.

H Wow. Ten?

E Ten.

H You are the baby?

E I am the baby. I am the baby of twelve. I have one sister that passed.

H So what was that like growing up? You had a full household?

E Rough. I had to fight my way through it. [Laughter]

H So you could not have been too timid, huh?

E No, no. They always called me the baby. "You are the baby, the baby." The baby did not get her way because I had to fight for it. Since I was the one that worked while I went to school, I was able to buy me clothes and they would always go in my closet while I would be at work, and I had to come home and fight them, you know, to get out of my clothes, because I was smaller than them and they would stretch my clothes. It was interesting.

H. How did you like school?

E Oh, I loved it. I loved school. I did not ever have a problem with going to school. My mother was sort of open about this. She told me as long as I brought home

decent grades, you know, she was not going to ask me about it. And I was not the type that would just skip school. I was a monitor during school. You know, I was monitoring in the absentee office, and I got along great with the principal, and I see him to this day. We still stop and talk, and he came to our class reunion last year. Yeah, I had a good time in school.

H What kind of student were you?

E I was on Homecoming Court my senior year. I was voted most popular, so you can see I really came out of that shell. I was in the shop and vocational center, for seamstress. I went to Rayen in the morning and then down in the afternoon for seamstressing. I used to make all my clothes. You know, me and my sister, we used to dress alike, because I have one that is two years older than me, and they said we used to look so much alike, and we used to make little outfits alike and go to different functions together. It was nice.

H What did you do once you got out of high school?

E The first year, I went to California. And I went to airline stewardess school. I learned a lot. I forget the name of the school. It was in Englewood, California.

H And you went by yourself?

E Yeah, my brother lived in California and he stayed in Pasadena. And on his way to work, because he worked at the Naval base, he would drop me off on his way to work and he would pick me up on his way home. And I met girls from all over the United States. We had girls from Mexico, New York, everywhere. It was nice.

H How long were you out there?

E I was there until that December and it was an experience. I had never been in an earthquake before until I was there.

H You were in an earthquake?

E I was in an earthquake. I was in a windstorm. I did not know where I was. My brother came in and woke me up and told me I had to move my bed away from under the window because the wind was so strong, he was scared that the glass might fall in. And that was kind of scary. And I felt the ground move up under my feet for the first time. I did not like that, so California weather did not agree with me. So after I finished the school, I was on the first thing smoking back to Youngstown. [laughter] So I came back and I attended YSU.

- H You came to YSU What did you take up at YSU?
- E I was going for, there was like a secretarial studies, for short-hand and typing, a couple of those courses I just did not want to do this, either Well, it was alright for a while, but it is just not me So I left and I went to Washington
- H Washington D C ? What did you do there?
- E I worked at the post office I stayed there for two years, two or three years
- H What brought you to Washington?
- E My sister and them moved down here, the one that was two years older than me We were very close, so she told me to come down for a while. So I did, and I worked at the post office and I worked at little odd and end jobs for the government for awhile I got fed up with Washington I guess that fast life really just was not me I like the city, but the fast life was not me My brother told me to come back here and he would see about getting me on at G M
- H Did he work at G M ?
- E He worked at the plant He was a foreman at the plant So I came back here and, while he was trying to get me on up there, I found other jobs I went to work for the people who helped me while I was in school, for the Associated Neighborhood Centers
- H You became one of those ladies that helped students
- E Yeah, I was a bookkeeper because I had learned how to do bookkeeping and stuff So I worked down there at the Associated Neighborhood Centers as a bookkeeper, and I also worked at Sears I worked two jobs
- H How long did you work at Sears?
- E About two years Well no, it was a year Yeah, I worked at Sears a year After awhile, I left Associated Neighborhood Centers and I put the application in for G M So then they called me I left Associated Neighborhood Centers and I still tried to stay on at Sears for awhile, but I had to leave because I could not do it I was working ten hours out there and working part-time at Sears and it did not work
- H What shift were you working when you were hired?

E I worked at G M in the afternoon and I worked at Sears in the daytime, in the morning

H. When did you sleep?

E It was rough When we got off from work, it would be, I think, three thirty in the morning But I would sleep, because I was single I did not have anything else to do I would sleep in and then I would get up and go out to Sears at eleven o'clock I just could not do the lunch hours That is all I really did So then I told them I had to give it up because it was starting to wear and tear on my body. I got, like this skin, you could barely see me So I stopped that And then I just stayed on at G M

At first, I was not active in the union, my first year But then I got laid-off from GM and I was off for, it was like six months or something like that We had a chance to put in applications for a transfer to other plants and I did But then I was sitting around and I got bored and I said, "Well, I am going to go to Atlanta." Me and my girl friend, we got in a car and we drove down to Atlanta And I had a friend that was there, so we stayed with him And the weekend that I got there, I got a phone call from my mom telling me I had to come back because I had to go back to work I said, "No." She said, "Yes " She said, "They told me you are to report Monday " So I had to leave that Saturday in order to get some sleep to be there that Monday And they called me over to the van plant to work

So I went and I worked there for three months I did not lose my seniority Those three months helped me because when I worked there, I worked there the three months and then I got laid off from there, and then I was off for, all together, it turned out to be twelve months -- twelve or thirteen months In between times, since I had worked at the van plant, my seniority did not get reinverted Other women that had worked there, they never did work at another plant They did not get called So they worked less time than when they got laid off It was called reinverted seniority They worked less than what they were laid off So then they lost their time, but I did not.

H Did you have to fight for it?

E. No No, a lot of them were still fighting, but then after they were explaining how the system worked, they stopped, because that was just General Motors

H. Their policy, huh?

E Yeah

H How have you encountered and dealt with racism on the job? Have you encountered it?

E. Well, yeah. But when I did encounter it, they have a department, the FEPC [Fair Employment Practice Commission], so I just put in for a civil rights call. Plus, you have to put in for a committee call, for the committeeman, and after you put in for a committeeman, then he puts the call in to the FEPC. I went to my committeeman and I told him the problem I was having, which was not too long ago. It was with the coordinator, and he really, he just does not like blacks. He does not like women because he is going through a divorce. So, I was the only woman on this relief, and he only had seven people. And the way he did me, I felt like it was wrong, and I let him know right there. I told him, "You do not do that, because I have never done anything to you, and if I did, I wish you would come to me and let me know. We could settle this. But since you want to act like that," I said, "then we will just go to another level with this." So then I put the committee call in. And he was warned, you know, to stay away from me. He is not around me. He walks by me now, but he does not say anything.

H. So it resolved it?

E. Yeah, it resolved it. But he just stays away from me and everybody knows how he is.

H. Did other co-workers support you?

E. Yes. I was very proud of the guys, because I was the only that worked there. I was very proud of them. When I came back, they actually told me of the things that happened, that he did and he said to them, you know, because they knew how he was discriminating against me because I was a woman and because I was, you know, an African-American woman.

One guy came up and told me that the guy that was on the job before me -- it was a day I was off because I was on the election committee and it was a vote for the contract -- the guy that was doing my job, he gave him breaks. You know, at least three or four breaks that whole day, never complained about him, let him go home early. And then the next day when I came in to do the job, I ask for a break to go to the restroom, he told me he was not my coordinator. He did not have to give me a break. I said, "Fine." And I just put in a call for the foreman and I told him, "I need a break. I am not going to argue with this man. But you get somebody down here to give me a break." So he said, "Okay."

But then right after that, I turned around and I pulled the cord because I was having a problem on my job. And since he was not my coordinator, he was not servicing me. I felt like he was wrong. He came up and released the cord, and I am going down the line with the car trying to repair it, and I turned around and seen and said, "Did you release that cord?" And he said, "Yes." I said, "Why?" He said, "Well, I was standing here." I said, "But my eyes are not in back of my head, okay? You release the cord, I cannot see you back there. You

did not say anything You are not my coordinator. Why would you do that?" He pissed me off

H Did you write that up?

E Yeah, I did That is when I hit the roof I told him, I said, "Get somebody down here right now. I am not taking this mess from him and nobody else " So they pulled me off the line and I sat down with the committeeman and I told him, "I want to meet with him in here. I want to tell him to his face how I feel." He said, "Well, you could not do that," he said, "because he did not want to, you know, blow it all out of proportion I said, "No, I am not going to blow it out of proportion I want to talk to him, face to face It is best to get this resolved now, because if you do not, then it will get blown out of proportion " I said, "Before I come in here, and it be another post office event " But he would not do it, so I told him, "Okay " But he said him and the foreman would pull him off to the side and talk to him. I said, "You just let him know where I stand at Because I am giving you fair warning Next time, I will not be this nice " So then I got off that job I just left

H So you are doing something else?

E Yeah I went to another job

H Was that up to you or them?

E Well, that was up to me. The job I was doing was just a temporary job anyway, and they were going to eliminate it As a matter of fact, they did, right after I got off of it, the eliminated They put it on somebody else's job

H Oh, they reassigned it

E Yeah

H Do you know what FEPC stands for?

E It is Fair Employment Practice Commission

H Have you ever dealt with other problems of racism like that?

E Yes. There is too many to even tell you about We could sit here for days Do you really want comb through that?

H. That is okay I have the time

E Let us see I went through one sexual harassment charge I was on the B crew then

H That is afternoons?

E Yeah And I was doing my job and in between the cars, you know, you are allowed to read papers and stuff And you have a job station It is really just like a little table. I had papers sitting there After I did the job, I turned around and I was leaning, I mean I was actually leaning up against the station reading the paper, standing up straight, reading the paper This guy, he walked by and he actually, you know, laid the whole back of his hand across my behind And I looked around and I was stunned I could not believe he did that So, I was so pissed I just looked at him, and he kept on walking

So when he came back by, I stopped him, and I asked him -- I still see his face to this day -- when he came back from his break I said, "When you walked by me, you brushed up against my behind." And he looked at me, and said, "Yeah, I did " I said, "Okay, excuse me, but you are telling me that you know you brushed up against my behind " I said, "Now are you not going to apologize?" And he looked me dead in the face and told me, "No " I said, "Okay, you know you brushed up against my butt, but you are not going to apologize?" He said, "No, I am not " I said, "Okay, fine " I let him walk away and I went to the committeeman first, I seen him walking by I told him what happened and he said, "Charmaine, I am putting in a call We will handle it " I said, "You had better handle this now " He said, "I have got another emergency I have got to go I will be back "

I was floored I was floored I could not wait for him to get back So I told this guy, I said, "Do you know who my husband is?" So he said, "Yeah " I said, "He is probably up in the cafeteria Would you go up there and get him for me?" He said, "Okay " And I told the guy what happened, and I said, "But do not tell my husband " So he come back My husband came down and he sat at my job and I told him what happened Then after I told him what happened, he jumped up and said, "Where is that MF at?" You know So I went over and I pointed to where he was because he was down in line I told him where he was He went down there and the girl that worked next to me, she had seen all of this and her and her boyfriend, she was telling him what was going on And his name is Frank, too Her name was Shirley and his name was Frank And I told him, "Watch my job I had better look over here and make sure everything is okay "

I looked and I seen that it was not alright, because my husband was snatching the guy, and the guy was in the trunk of the car trying to do the job, I thought he was And then I hollered back over to Frank I told him, "Frank, Shirley, go get Sarge," which was my coordinator then I told him, "Go get him to tell him he got to come do my job." So I ran down the line to go get him, and I snatched him I told him, "Let him go, let him go." I said, "It is not worth that " I

said, "I will just bring up charges on him " He said, "No, I will kick his ass He had no business doing that " I told him, "Let him go " The guy, he was trying to crawl into the trunk of the car It was so wild And then this other guy, I was trying to stop him from hitting the guy And another guy named Richard came up and grabbed me He said, "Charmaine, let go of him before he turns around and hits you " I said, "You had better get out of the way, fool, because my husband is not going to hit me " I said, "You had better move." So then he finally let me go, and I got my husband to let the guy go So when he walked away he comes to him, he says, "Let me tell you something As long as you living, you do not ever in your life go nowhere near my wife again, or I am going to do something to you " So I got him to walk away

And then they came down, I mean they had to stop the line, literally stop the line The committeeman told me he seen the whole thing but nobody liked this guy, so he walked off, he said, because he knew nobody was going to bother my husband They know he has a temper So he just went the other way And he did not tell me that then The committeeman told me a few months later that he had seen it I said, "Bobby, why did you let all that happen, when you could have stopped it?" And he said, "I felt like the guy was getting what he deserved Because he had not business disrespecting you like that " I said, "True, true " They brought the FEPC down and when we resolved it, the whole thing was, the only thing he had to do was do like I asked him in the beginning That is apologize And he was talking about he was going to take me to court and stuff because my husband hit him I said, "I wish you would Go for the gusto "

H But he has not bothered you since?

E He does not speak to me He was advised to go, so he does not say anything One was with a foreman He tried to kiss me

H A foreman? How long ago was that?

E It was in the 1980's

H Was it before you were married?

E Yeah, it was before I was married, but I was still with my husband

H How did you handle that one?

E I handled myself a little bit better on that, because I had to I had to go up to Ohio civil rights to Akron It had to go through management and stuff When it first happened, the only thing I did, I went up to him and I asked him for a day off,

for a vacation day, because my sister's boyfriend she was living with had died, and asked for a vacation day so that I could go up to the services. And he came to me and he told me, "No." And I was standing there and I said, "Well, why?" And he would not give me an answer. He just came towards me and puckered up like he was going to kiss me. I had a tool in my hand, and I had been talking to one of the security guards before, about two weeks or three weeks before that. They had had an altercation up there where a guy had beat a foreman with a mallet, you know, that you put the windows in with. And he was getting fired for using General Motors' property. And I had known this security guard who told me, "If you ever get mad about your work, where you want to do something to somebody, do not use nothing that belongs to General Motors, because that is grounds for firing."

So after he told me that, I dropped that tool, and I told him, I said, "You dirty mother fucker." He ran because he knew he was wrong. And I ran after him. I went after him. He went into the office and there was some guys that seen this. Our relief man, he actually seen him come towards me and try to kiss me. He seen the whole thing and he was a witness for me. They told me, "Get him, Charmaine. Get him." They knew I was one of the ones that would fight in a minute. So he ran. It was so funny, I will never forget it. He ran into the office, so I did not say anything. I walked off and I went and got the committeeman and I told him what happened.

Joe Palermo was my committeeman then. I do have to give it to Joe. He handled that very well. He handled that so well. He came and got me and sat down and I told him what happened. And he said, "Well, what he did was wrong." He said, "We will, go on in to the office now, and we are going to talk to him." The general foreman did. We all went into the office and we talked to him, and I was not satisfied because all they were going to do was slap him on the hand and tell him just not to do it anymore. So I told Joe, I said, "Joe, put me in a call for the FEPC." And back then, the guy's name was James Smith, and he came and he wrote up the charges and stuff. I talked to him and he went to the foreman, which his name was Riley Robinson. And he still works there to this day. He went to him and he charged him, that is what they call it when you confront the accused. He charged him and told him that he was to stay away from me, and warned him that he was not to come around me and that charges would be brought up against him.

Riley sort of stayed away from me for awhile, but then I got to the point where I felt like he was picking on me because I would not go along with what he wanted. He had been asking me out on dates and stuff, but I did not want to be bothered with him like that, and I told him, "You know, you are not the type of man that I feel like I am going to be bothered with. No." And I kept turning him down, and he kept asking me to go out. "No." Well, we called him Robby. I told him, "Robby, get out of my face." You know, "No, I do not want to be bothered with you." So after awhile, I left him alone.

He left me alone, but then he started trying to pick on me at my job. He tried to add stuff on to my job. And I was naive and I did not know then, but I actually came out and told him that I was not going to do it. That is when I started on about the contract, because then I found out I could not come out and just say, "No," because he was giving me a direct order because he was my boss. So they was trying to add this work on to my job and I came out and told him, "No." I was not doing this. I got thrown out. Okay, that was suspended without pay.

H How long was that for?

E Okay, they threw me out that day, so that was the rest of that day, and then I could not report to work the next day. So that was it. The balance of that day and then one more day.

H You do not get paid?

E. I did not get paid for it then, but I ended up getting paid for it afterwards because, not only did I get thrown out then, I got thrown out two other times after that, because I felt it all stemmed from that sexual harassment.

H It was underneath him the other two times, too?

E He was my foreman.

H So how did you confront that?

E In the end, I ended up going to the Ohio Civil Rights Commission up in Akron and they had found out that he had been sexually harassing quite a few other women. So a bunch of us got together. It was me and one other girl, we drove up to Akron and we talked to the lady up there, and they called back down to the plant and they told them that if there was any more harassment from Robby, that we would bring charges up against him, and they would be federal charges. So he was told to stay away from us.

H And he did?

E He sort of backed off. He sort of backed off from us.

H Did he stay your foreman?

E. Well, I got so tired of him by then. I had put in a thirty-day hardship because I was going through personal problems with my mother, because my mother was

older, she was forgetting to take her medicine and stuff. So I went on a thirty-day hardship and when I went, I stayed longer than thirty days, so I lost that job. So when I came back, he was no longer my foreman.

H So you do not work with him?

E No, not now. I have worked for him since then. He has gotten married now. Me and his wife are friends, we are cool. She knows about the hell he gave me, because I did tell her. I was not going to bite my tongue. I told her, "Your husband is a real asshole." But I guess he has sort of changed here. When I was off on maternity leave, he got suspended. Some of the guys, it was the same guys that worked around on that line when he was sexually harassing me, got even with him. I used to pray on that, that something would happen to him. And I just wanted to be alive to see it happen. But I was just so hurt that I was not there to see it. I was in the hospital, and they called me and told me what happened, that he had got suspended for, it was sabotage.

Now, I do not know if you could call it sabotage. He gave someone a direct order to do their job and they tried to tell him, they said, "Riley, if I put this head liner up in here," there was something else that was supposed to go up in there. It was like fiberglass. They used to line the roofs of the vans with it when we were in the van plant. They used to line the roofs of the vans with this stuff and then they put the head liner up. And it was not in there; I guess they had run out. He gave him a direct order to put that head liner up there without that padding in there. So those guys wrote down the job number, and when they got downstairs to where the car was almost complete and done, they took the serial number of the van over to the top executive, and they went and pulled that material down from the car and it was not there, and he got suspended. So it was like sweet revenge, he walked out of there crying. So that sort of changed him.

H Humbled him. When you talked about sabotage, have there been other instances where you know about sabotage? For other reasons, you know, when somebody is angry.

E Yes. They fired one guy saying he had sabotaged. He did not do that. And we fought to get him his job back, which he did. He ended up getting his job back, and it was under that same foreman, before he changed. We used to call the guy Beetle. He had just got hired and he was young and he did not know. But we was telling him, you know, because we used to look out for younger people, we still do. I still do to this day. I do not care if it is a man or a woman, you know, black, white, whatever. If you are young and you come in there, you do not know, I will pull you to the side and tell you, "Do not do this," you know, to keep the foreman off of him and stuff, and keep him in line. I let them know their

rights

He really, he did not do this -- an environmental sabotage. So in order for us to get back, they would have the sweepers go around and clean up everything. And we would know right then that a housekeeping tour was coming through, and we would save all our trash, and right before the housekeeping tour would come by, everybody would throw all their trash out into the aisle. He would get in so much trouble, the foreman would be in so much trouble. He hated Robby with a passion. He hated Robby. And he would holler at Robby and we would just stand back and laugh. We would stand back and laugh at him so hard, and he would look like a fool. He made him look like a fool quite a few times.

H Is he still a foreman?

E. Yes

H But you are not around him?

E No, he is on another shift. That was one of these things, sabotage, but he ended up getting his job back. I do not know who did it, but they could not blame it on him.

H I see that you have a twelve-year-old daughter. How do you cope with being a working mother?

E. Well, it is rough. But I sort of involve her. She kind of likes it, because I am on the Women's Committee and I take her to the meetings with me. She gets involved. They have sort of adopted her as another. She is like an honorary Women's Committee member. We have Spring luncheons and stuff, and I take her with me when we go and decorate. She keeps the women in line, when they get slow and they are moving too slow, she will say "Mommy, go over there and help them because they need help because they are moving too slow." She is real good. They all know her. She does good. I took her out to the plant. It was take your child to work day. But you can only do it on the day when they had it. So I took her out there, and, well the plant is so big, she got too tired. She could not take it.

H Oh, yeah, standing and walking around.

E. Walking. We only made it to two departments. I took her over and showed her my job. And then we went over to chassis and I was going to stop and introduce her to the guy that was running for president, Jimmy Gram. I said to her, "Let us just wait until after we do the tour, then you can get your cookies and stuff,

and then we will go up and I will introduce you to him ” But by the time we got done, her feet was sore So we had to stop before we got done Then she said, “Mommy, my feet hurt, can you please give me a ride?” So it just so happened, I turned around and there was a guy that I know, he is on the Election Committee with me. I turned around and he was there He said, “Can I help you guys?” This thing only seats two, but it has a long flat bed on the back of it So she said, “Mommy, please, please My feet hurt so bad ” So I said, “Okay ” I said, “George, can you give us a ride up front?” He said, “Yeah,” so she got in the seat and I got on the flatbed, because I could hold on where she could not So she got up front, but she never did get a chance to meet Jimmy, and she got mad at me

H: Do you and your husband work the same shift? How do you manage someone being home with her while you are working?

E: No, I am on day-turn. At first we were both on B-crew, and my mother was watching her And then that got to be a hassle, because then I had to go home and go to sleep, get up at six o'clock in the morning, go over and pick Carol up, come home, get her dressed for school And then I would be dog tired So I stopped doing that I got wise When they started the three crews -- they started A, B, and C -- he has always worked afternoon turn. I could not hold day turn and he had to work afternoon turn, because he poured concrete in the morning, because everybody out at General Motors has a side job that they do. So I could not hold day turn. But then when they started C crew, I started C crew, and that was working Friday, Saturday day turn, and Sunday, Monday, you would go out at night, so I went C crew while he stayed afternoon turns

They only problem was, it would be like on a Sunday and Monday, both of us would be on afternoon turn So on Sunday's on my way to work, I would take her to my mother's house He would get off before me, so he would go home and he would go to sleep When I got off, I would go straight home and go to bed, and when he got up in the morning , he would go -- because he is an early bird -- he would go over and get her and bring her home She was old enough then that she could get herself dressed He would fix her breakfast, and I could sleep straight through

H: So he helped?

E: Yeah

H: Why did you become active in the union?

E: My daughter's godfather, he really started getting me to union meetings Him and another friend of mine, her name is Marilyn She is on the Women's

Committee with me, too. She pushes me. They both told me to start coming to the union meeting. So I started going to the union meeting and Marilyn would come over and get me. We would go to the union meeting. And sometimes I would tell Harry, I would make up excuses. I would not have a babysitter and stuff. He said, "Bull. Bring her with you." He said, "A lot of people bring their kids." So I started taking her with me. Then I started seeing how things were going, you know, and I did not like the things that were happening to the women in the plant. I wanted to learn more about the book, about the contract booking [I wanted to] Learn more about, you know, how you get into different things. You know, how you get on the Election Committee and get into politics, because I started getting into politics outside, you know, in my everyday life, because my sister-in-law ran for Third Ward Council, and I was helping her. So then I started going back to union meetings and getting political.

H So you are active in politics outside as well?

E Yeah, I helped campaign. I helped my sister-in-law a lot. I was always a registered voter, because the women that helped us when we were in school, they made sure we also signed up to be registered voters. They got me active in that. You know, they wanted me to take ballots, petitions out to the plant, to have people, you know, sign them for different things. I always did that, and I would go door to door campaigning for, you know, people that I really wanted to see in there. And always campaigning, like when Jesse Jackson ran for President. I campaigned for that.

H What problems did you see women having at work?

E Well, some of the things were the women were just being over-looked for a lot of things. There was just something about the way they were treating women. And I did not like it. You know, they would down women. And then some of the women brought it on themselves. I was not going to be like that. I wanted to have something to do with the union but not [be] looked down on.

H Did they treat women like that in the union?

E The management and the union.

H Oh, both of them?

E Yes.

H How were they unfair?

E. It depends on who you were. You know, if you were a part of them, then they would look out for you. And there was a couple of jobs and stuff that, you know, I would put in for, and if I was not a part of them, back then, they did not go by seniority. It was like, you would put in for a job, you had to put in like, AVO's

H. What is an AVO?

E. I do not know why they called it that. They just called it an AVO. I really do not know. And if you did not find out about the job you put in for at first, you did not get it.

H. So it was like a secret society?

E. Right. You know, they knew about the jobs was coming open, but if you did not fill it out in time you did not get the job. It was not right, so I fought that.

H. How did you fight it?

E. Well, one girl, she put in an AVO and I put in an AVO, and we both did at the same time. We both had the same seniority. But I had her by a bit. They tried to give her the job. I raised hell. I raised hell. That is not right. Management tried to give it to her, and I just would not do it. I would not sit back and let them do this. You know, this system is not fair, it is not fair. I did not like the way this is going here. It was not the way it should have been.

H. How did you fight it? What steps did you take?

E. I ended up getting the job. I just raised my voice to the point where I let the other people know on the line. I was younger in seniority. There were other women there that had more seniority than me and they always stuck up, you know, stuck up for the least seniority people. And they stuck up for me. They fought for me. So I ended up getting the job, because they knew it was not right. Because the way they did that, it was totally wrong, and I went to Lenore and I told them, and I was so mad, I was crying. I was ready to fight. And I told them, I said, "Lenore, that is not right. I filled out an AVO for that job, too. Just like she did." And Lenore said, "You are right, that is not right." And she went to the committeeman and she spoke up for me because, I guess they thought I was naive then. Lenore would push me and get me to do things. She knew the loopholes, some of them.

H. Was she in the union?

E. She was. She is a union member, but she is not that active. She just spoke out.

for her rights. She was a very outspoken person. Her and this other guy named Bill Chapman, they stuck up for me. They stuck up for me and they helped me to get that job. I could not do anything, legally, then. I did not know the book and stuff.

I told them I wanted one of those books. And I told them, "I pay dues. I feel like I am entitled to one." They said, "Well, you are not going to understand it." I said, "Well, give me a chance." You know, I said, "I pay dues. If I pay dues, I feel like I am entitled to one of those contract books." And then I found out that the baby's godfather, he would help me out. I would sit there and read it and, if I had any questions, I would go to him and ask him. He was very good. And then I had another committeeman, they would sit down and talk to me, and I would read it. I just found out where my rights were being violated. I started speaking up.

As long as you did not speak up, they would keep on doing it to you. But when I read that book and I started reading it, I would find out what my rights were. If somebody did something to me and I felt like it was wrong, then I would ask somebody, or I would look in the book, in the index. I just got a feeling that my civil rights were being violated. Or if it was like, if it was discrimination or if it was like -- what do they call it -- non-bargaining and bargaining, if it had something to do with the job, and there was a section in the book for that. It is all different sections where, you know, you could read the index and know where to go to in the book and you could find out and read it.

- H Can you think of a specific instance, like with discrimination, where you went to the book and you used it?
- E Not off hand. One problem in particular was when I put in for a vacation, and he told me, at least tried to use language on me that would, you know, intimidate me, and he said I did not fill out my vacation request form during the request period time. It was some old mumble-jumble he was using. I said, "Excuse me, it does not matter if I did or if I did not fill it out during the vacation request period time. I still have vacation days that I am entitled to. I take those vacation days all year." I said, "Now, you have not even bothered to go even look at the calendar book to see if the day is open." I said, "That is the only thing I am asking you. Do not try that mumble-jumble on me, okay?" I said, "Because I could go to the book and pull out why I am still entitled to my vacation." So then, you know, he backs off. He backed off. Let me see, are there any other times?
- H What is your job at Lordstown?
- E. I am on the assembly line putting in seatbelts. It is the seatbelt, it is just one. It is called seatbelt schedule. I have to make sure it is the right color. You hang it on one spot and you just shoot a rivet for the belt to come up the side. I shoot

that, put that on I shoot the rivet on the two-door, and on the four-door I just hang it in And then there is a brace that goes inside on the two-door, and it is to keep, if somebody was to hit you, on the impact, it would keep the car from going in and damaging somebody sitting there It is just a little square I put it in there, well I start it, and someone else finishes with the bolt.

H How many different jobs within the plant have you done?

E Quite a few Quite a few Let me see I have been on this job about four months I have been on day turn two years, it will be two years in October, and since I have been on day turn I have had, let us see. One, two, three -- about seven or eight jobs That is just on day turn.

H You train for each, right?

E Yeah. The way it goes, that is in the contract book What you would find in the contract book, is how long you have to train on the job When I first got hired, it was written in the local contract book that you have three days to train on the job Okay, but then they ended up having to change that because everybody is not the same And nobody learns things in the same amount of time You cannot put a specified amount of time on one person Now they will keep you, like, it depends. They say as long as necessary, as long as it is within a reasonable amount of time There are some jobs that I learned within a matter of a day or two, and then there are some jobs that have taken, maybe like seven days. And it is also calander days It tells you if you are entitled to calander days or work days. Okay, there is a difference The calander days would be every day, and the work days would be just like the days that you work, that you actually work That part is in the book

The one job that I am on now, I learned it, it took me about three days to actually learn the job But to be comfortable where, if I get in the hole -- and getting in the hole is when you get in the next person's way -- to get comfortable doing that job, it took me about two weeks, really But, you struggle with it at first See, people come over and talk to you, and you have to learn how to do that job and still talk to them, and concentrate and do it right And that is something human, you are going to make a mistake Every once in a while, I will put in the wrong seatbelt It will be the wrong color, because there are two colors in the car -- there is a pewter and there is a neutral -- and those colors look so much alike when just glancing at it And if you glance at it and you are talking to someone, you could easily pick up the wrong color and put the wrong color in But more than likely, it will get caught It does not get out of the plant like that

Every seven people have a coordinator, and the coordinator is like a repairman He services them, gives them E breaks if they have to go to the restroom He lets them go on the medical He fixes something that, you know,

that they do wrong on the job. They take down the job number on the car, and then our foremen have like a little microphone or radio, and if they find something wrong, they will call back over and tell the foreman on that line that they have this job number, such and such is wrong, then they will send the coordinator, and he will go fix it.

H Are there men and women coordinators, or is that predominately male?

E Funny you asked that. There are no women coordinators. I do not know of any yet because, see, the way the plant is set up, women did not get hired into General Motors until 1970, 1971, 1972. Most of them have twenty-five years in now. Yeah, 1972, that is when women started getting hired. And all the coordinator jobs, they are like, good jobs, because you do not work on the line, you are not chasing that chain, so most of the people who have coordinator jobs have, like, 1966, 1968, 1969 seniority, and the women do not have that kind of seniority.

H So men have been there longer?

E Yes, so we cannot have those jobs. There are very few women in maintenance, period. Well, sweeping. The non-skilled jobs. Now, there are women in the apprenticeship program because, well, they cannot stop you there, as long as you pass the test. They cannot discriminate in those areas. There are women that are sweepers. I know there is one, and me and her went to school together and I was so glad to see her. She is a sweeper. She has older seniority, because she has seven more. Her name was Berta Charleston. She is the highest seniority woman.

H. In the plant?

E Yes. Seven more seniority. There are other women. There is another woman, Helen. Helen is seventy-two, seventy-three.

H So that is how all the jobs go?

E Yes, it goes by seniority. The coordinator's jobs, there is no way a woman could get that right now, until some of the men start retiring. And most of the men are not retiring. There is one, he will not retire because he has thirty years and he will not retire. He is in maintenance and he says why should he retire?
[Laughter] He is already retired. He does not do anything. He goes in and cleans the ladies' bathroom.

H. Do they pay by job description or by seniority?

E Oh no They cannot pay by seniority They cannot do that. That would be discriminatory So they pay by job title Okay The job coordinators, coordinators make more than the rest of them, would you believe? They make more than the people on the line, but maintenance get paid less an hour, but they make more than us because they work more hours

H. Overtime

E Yes And they work holidays, where we very seldom get holidays Like along Christmas time when we are off, usually it is like ten days, it is like eight to ten days that we are off They work. But they do not do anything They go out there, and they may clean up for maybe about four or five hours, and then the rest of the time they play cards, or they are sleeping They got all kinds of beds stored away out there and stuff Their foremen come around and they make them, they take them down and stuff and the guys go back and put them back up again

H There is only one woman on maintenance?

E Yeah Well, no, there is two women. There is two or three women, but she just has more seniority, that is all. We were fighting to get her to clean the ladies' restrooms But there was no way we could do it without discriminating against the men, because she did have more seniority As soon as we could get to her seniority, I told her, "Berta, I am fighting to get you, as a sweeper, to clean up our restroom " I would like to see her more permanent, you know?

H Right What kinds of problems have you encountered in balancing work and family responsibilities?

E Well, my husband is still pretty fair He does not fuss about, you know, things not getting done, because he cooks and he cleans. He does not say too much about that I have not had a problem. I will be tired because I force myself to do things, and I know it has to be done, but he does not seem to mind And my daughter says, after a while I feel like I am neglecting her, she says, "Mamma, when are you going to spend some time with me?" So then I start looking and I say, "Okay," and I will take a vacation day and we spend the whole day together You know, most of the time on the weekends, I try to do something with her You know, take her with me

I am trying to get her to do things because she understands Like all last week I could not be with her because of the elections, and it was hard, so Sunday, it was her birthday -- her birthday was last week -- so I did take the day off for her birthday After she got out of school, I took her out to dinner and we sat up and watched movies and we went shopping, we went on a shopping

spree, as she says. And I took her out to the mall and bought her the things that she wanted, and we sat around and just talked and played games and stuff. I bought her that Challenge game. We sat there and played that. And we played Monopoly. She just really wants somebody to spend some time, just to sit there and tell her that you love her and give her a hug and sit and do her homework. She will be fine for a little while. And she gives me my messages and she is doing good. I am really proud of her because since I have been on day turn, I have still been active in the union, she still manages to stay on honor roll.

H So you do not have to stay after her?

E No. She comes in, and she does her homework. She is kind of responsible, because when she gets out of school, there is no one there at home, and she has a key, and she has been doing this since I have been on day turn. She comes in the house and I will make sure that there is something to eat for her there, and even if I have to get up early, like a half hour early, for work, I will throw something in the oven. When I leave, I tell my husband, "Look, I put something in the oven. Make sure it does not burn or something else. And when you get up, take it out." And then I will throw salad or something in the refrigerator, or I will go out and buy her something and she can throw it in the microwave. And she comes home and she fixes herself something to eat and she does her homework, and by the end, I am home from work. For a while she was in gymnastics and on Monday's, I would come home and I would change my shoes and wash my face and try to grab, maybe, just a piece of meat and run back out the door and take her to gymnastics. Then we would come home in the evening and I would sit there and do her homework with her. And then she would take a shower, I would take a shower, then I would sit down to eat and pass out. [Laughter] So, it was rough, but it is coming around.

H What do you feel is the hardest part of being a working mother?

E The hardest part is not enough hours in the day. There is not enough hours in the day to do everything that I want to do. And I am kind of sad, because now, Sunday being Mother's Day, and since I am on the Election Committee, I just found out that I am going to have to work. And usually it is my off day. I have to go out and do this because I raise so much hell out there about them not sharing the responsibilities with the women on the committee. So I have to go, and now she is kind of hurt. My daughter is kind of hurt. She said, "Mommy, you have to go to work on Mother's Day?" So I told her, "Yeah." I am going to go to church for her. And I will be with her all day, until I have to go to work. And it is not actually work. I have to work the election and it is only from three to seven, for four hours. And after that, I will go back over to my mom's because she is going to dinner with the rest of my family. I do have my family supporting me. So, they

will take her and go to dinner

H. What kind of problems have you encountered at work, or with the union, because you are an African-American woman?

E Well, I do not know if it is necessarily because I am an African-American woman

H. We were talking before about certain heads in the union, you felt they were prejudice.

E Oh, yeah Tony Yeah He does not really discriminate just because I am black He discriminates because I am a woman, period

H: So he is more sexist than racist?

E He is a pig Yeah

H How do you deal with that? How do you cope?

E I smile at him because he cannot stand that He is one of those people that, if you show your anger, then that is what he thrives off of So you do not show that And I just look at him and I smile, just smile at him

H: So it is him you are involved with?

E Yes

H That is within the union, though, right?

E. Yes

H You would not call it a grievance, though?

E. It is not a grievance It is a civil suit, because I brought up these charges and they are sexual discrimination charges

H: Against him as past president?

E It is against the chairperson of our Election Committee I do not really have a problem with him, but I had to do it to him in order to get to the president

H You could not go straight to the president?

E No, because, see, he is doing what the president told him to do and that is the only way I can get to the president because this guy, the only thing he has to do is have enough strength to stand up to him

H But is it not he that appoints him?

E No, he is an elected position. It is an elected position. He is supposed to stay out of it.

H Oh, I thought the heads of the committees are appointed.

E We are all elected. The Women's Committee is elected. There are ten standing committees where the president is over them. He appoints those. He has the power to put people on and take people off of those committees.

H But not your committee?

E Not the Election Committee. We are selected by the membership. We have an election for it. That was one of the times when I had to neglect my child and my family. I was out to the plants, walking all three shifts, you know, so that I could get elected on this Election Committee. And when I won, it was like a sigh of relief. My feet were relieved. [Laughter] I was so tired. But that committee is not appointed. That was an elected position. And I feel like the membership elected me to do this, and I have a job to do. That is how I feel. If they trust me, then why should the president of the local not? He should stay out of it and trust us.

H So he was trying to interfere with the Election Committee. How did he interfere?

E I cannot say.

H You cannot say, because it has to do with that?

E Yes. It has to do with the suit.

H Was it probably because of the current elections? It just happened?

E Because he did not get the people on the committee to win this election. We have this Election Committee at the union hall and he was very disappointed. He did not say it to me, but he was livid when all those people showed up, because all of those people that showed up, Jimmy Graham, this guy who ran for president, he backed me and these three other people, okay? And all of us got in. It seemed like that union hall was so packed. You know, it only holds 300 people. We had a fire hazard that day because there was over 500 people in

that union hall that turned out to vote, because they were just that tired of the way the president had been doing things, and they wanted a change. So they came out in droves and voted for the people they wanted in there. And it was me and another girl and Skip -- we were the three top vote-getters. And in the past practices, they have always had the top two vote-getters be co-chair and chairperson of the Election Committee. Not no more.

H. So the chair person, was he with your group or was he opposing?

E. He was just there opposing. So things had not changed. And now that we have had another election, and the opposing side, they had some person that was sort of like rocking the boat. They would be on our side, then they would be on their side, so they did not even know which way things were going to go. Instead of them going by past practices, the two top people being chair and co-chair, now they changed it so that we would elect -- there was 11 people elected to the election committee -- we would vote for who would be the chairperson and the co-chair. And they were sort of shaky about who, you know, because it was more women. We got seven women on the Election Committee now. And the women, when we were sticking together, we wanted Waldine as the chairperson of the Election Committee. But Waldine said she would not take it because she did not have the experience. So, we all agreed to nominate her as co-chair, so she ended up being co-chair, and they did not want that.

H. The men did not want it.

E: Yes.

H: So that is what is currently going on now. When were you elected?

E. We were elected [in] March.

H. Oh, just recently.

E. Just recently.

H. How do you think this has affected the current elections?

E. It has affected them a whole lot because if we had not got on, we would not [have] been able to bring the civil suit against the people that were trying to do things, and they probably would have run the election the way they wanted to.

H. So it is a joint suit, then. It is not just you.

E It is me and another girl that brought the suit up, but it protects all the other members on the Election Committee, except for the ones named in the suit. Some of them knew that they were doing things wrong on that committee, and they never spoke up. But the suit will still protect them.

H How long have you been involved in the union committees?

E My daughter was born in 1985, so I started the Women's Committee in 1986. I loved being on there because I got more knowledge, about the different conferences and stuff. They would go over women that were at the international level, they would give you the incentive. They give you that incentive to keep on going and to stick up for, you know, your rights. Not only your rights, but the other women's rights. And not necessarily women. Just the people. You know, if you see somebody doing something wrong in the plant, it would give you that incentive to take over where the people that were being wronged.

H So do you think that the Women's Committee is a political entity for the women, or do you think it is more of a social entity?

E No, I think it is more of like a sisterhood where you stick up for each other. And it gives you backing, you know? It brings out that self-esteem in you, which a lot of the women really need sometimes. It could be political at times, too, because, like, during the elections, we all get together and stick together and we rally for the people that are going to benefit the women and be for women's movements. The different things that we believe in.

H Do you see an increase in women's participation in the union, or a decrease?

E Oh, yes, I feel like it is getting stronger because I know quite a few women who really want to get on the Women's Committee. But our past president, he kept on down-sizing.

H He had control?

E He had control over committees where he could take people off of committees and put them on. But, see, there are rules to being on the committee. That is in the constitution for the union, where you have to attend so many meetings and you have to be active and if you have any problems, well, you are supposed to take a leave-of-absence. A lot of women, they were just lolly-gagging. They were getting non-active and they would stop coming to union meetings. They would stop participating because the Women's Committee would meet ever month, and it would be just the third Thursday or third Friday of every month. And they would stop coming to meetings, because some of them, they started

getting an attitude because they were not getting paid. If the meeting was not held on the day that they worked, they would not come up to the plant. And to me, that is crazy, because you have to volunteer some of your time if you want to get something out of it.

H: So are you appointed on to the Women's Committee?

E: Yes. Bill Bowers appointed me onto the committee.

H: And then once you are appointed you are on until there is a problem.

E: Until you resign or until they take you off, because you can resign. But when you resign, you have to give it to them in writing, because I did take a leave-of-absence for a while, when my mother was in the hospital sick, and I knew I did not have the time to go to work and run up to the hospital. And then after she got out of the hospital, I had to take care of her at home. And I did not have time to take care of two houses and a child.

H: So they have to have grounds to remove from the committee.

E: Right. They definitely have to have grounds, because I know now, I have some people that are fighting, and those people are fighting because he told them he removed them off the committee. Really, it is retaliation. He is really not allowed to do that.

H: Well, maybe now this president will re-appoint them.

E: He will, he will. I am more than sure that he will.

H: So was that a big issue, the Women's Committee or the politics that were going on between the president and the Women's Committee? Did that have an influence on the election?

E: A little bit. It was not necessarily the Women's Committee. It was me in particular, because he had it out for me because I did not go along with the way he was doing things. Nobody ever challenged him before. That is the only reason why he been re-elected.

H: Is there a limited number of appointments to the Women's Committee or unlimited?

E: Well, there is a limit, but I do not remember. Anna told me at one time, when she was chairperson of that committee. She said she would not wish this on nobody.

else again. It was like 40 women on the committee. She said that was too many. When I got on it, there was something like 32, which it was a nice group then. It was alright, because you always have a forum when you were at a meeting. Now, to me, we do not have enough.

H: About how many do you think there are?

E: There are only about 14.

H: And so when he takes someone off, he does not replace them.

E: No. Lisa is on there with me, but Lisa is not active until we are getting ready to have, like, Spring Luncheon, and we go to different other locals and support their luncheons and we sell different things in the plant to do things for the community. Last month, I did not get a chance to make it, my sister was in the hospital that day. She had a heart attack. But, we had a prom for the slow children, or the mentally retarded home in Vienna, and the Women's Committee sponsored the prom. And that is what we do with the money that we make. And then one time we bought blankets and sheets and gave food and stuff to the Rescue Mission. We do different things like that.

H: Community outreach.

E: Yes. One place got broke into -- the Safe House over in Warren -- they got broke into, so we replaced their VCR and their TV's and stuff like that. So we have different fundraisers in the plant, and then we go out we buy things for different organizations. So it is not all political. We do a lot of different things.

H: What other committees do women serve on within the union?

E: They serve on all of them. There are even women on the Veteran's Committee.

H: Oh, there are?

E: Yes, there is one lady, Edna Douglas, she is on the Women's Committee with me, too. She is also on the Veteran's Committee. She was in Desert Storm. Edna is very active, she is very active. She is a member of the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] and the Urban League. She is very active.

H: How has being active in the NAACP helped you?

E: Oh, well, when I need support, they are there for me. They lead me in the right

way and some of them give me the legal aspects of it I get lots of support, a whole lot, because there are a lot of guys that work out to the plant that are members of the NAACP and they will let you know They will speak out for you And then when they speak out, people tend to listen, and it helps, and they stop backing off. They back off a little bit until they feel like we are not intimidated anymore Then they back off.

H How do you describe solidarity among the women at your work?

E I do not know Some of them, I just do not like the things that they do, but the majority of them, the solidarity is pretty good It is good in the majority of the women, it is just a few

H What do the few do?

E Oh, you really do not want to know that [Laughter] You really do not want to know that They degrade the women That is not solidarity, when they do that That really is not

H How do they degrade?

E Well, some of the women out there, I do not appreciate their mouth. They have vulgar, vulgar mouths And I just look at her "Do you realize what you are saying?" They cuss worse than sailors And when they do that, the only thing I can do is say, "I do not believe what you are saying " Some of the things that you hear them women say would make you crawl under the table That is not solidarity But then sometimes I do feel very proud of them

When we were at the one rally for the teamsters, when they had their strike at Superior Beverage, I was really proud of them then because one girl, she was ready She was so gung-ho at that rally If I had not grabbed her, she would have been dead She would have been dead, and that was her first time ever really being at a rally And we really stuck together, as men and women But the women, we stuck together really because it was a lot of my sisters out there and we was holding hands We held hands and walked together And we tried to stop a truck You know, you just hold hands and stand there And this one semi, we knew they were not going to hit us, but this one fool, he was not stopping. He was coming full force, and that girl was walking straight towards that truck, and I had to reach out there and snatch her She was kind of naive, because it was her first real rally And I snatched her back I said, "Debbie, are you crazy?" She was just so hyped up But you had to have a sixth sense, you know, to feel that that man was not going to stop The majority of them did, but something just told me that fool was not going to stop And I snatched her back. Something just told me to just reach out and snatch her, pull her back And I will

tell, she was just crazy

H What was her name?

E Debbie Arrington Debbie did not fill out a paper

H How has being a woman affected your role in the workplace?

E It has made me a stronger woman, but my role in the workplace? It has gotten me more attention sometimes, because they tell me, "For a woman, you sure speak up for your rights." I feel like I should. I really feel like I should, because I am not going to sit back and let somebody walk all over me I cannot, I cannot let them

H Is that from being the youngest?

E Yeah

H. What is the most positive and negative issues you have faced? The new president?

E Yes Because he is going to bring character back to our local I could look at him and be proud, you know, because of what he represents.

H And you felt that the past president was not very supportive of women? How so?

E He actually came out and told us In our Women's Committee meeting, we had one opportunity where we wanted to put something on the informational flyer They pass out informational flyers every week or every month Once a month they pass out informational flyers, and you know what is going on So we wanted to pass out one, letting them know we wanted to have a trailer over to the union hall for women to go and get mammograms and things like that We wanted to pass this information out and he would not let us do it

H He would not let you have the mammogram van?

E. No They ended up bringing it over but, you know, he takes credit for it later But when we wanted to do it, he would not do it We wanted to give classes for women on sexual harassment and stuff like that "No, you cannot do that" We wanted to let the women know about their health, on how to go and feel, you know, tumors and stuff "You cannot do that" You know, just to have a seminar or something over to the union hall

H What was his reasoning?

E He said, "Well, we only have 600 women and all of those people, they do not want to read that stuff on the flyer." We said, "Excuse me, we are not only offering it to the women in the plant. What about the men whose wives might want to come?" Okay, we could educate other people. He would not do it. He was not supportive of the women at all.

H So would you say that was the most negative issue?

E Yes.

H How about past presidents?

E Bill, he was good.

H Bill Bowers?

E Bill Bowers, yes.

H How has women's acceptance in the union changed since you have joined?

E It is getting better, and I expect it to get a lot better.

H Now that the new president is there?

E Yes, because we are fighting more for our rights, and the men are starting to realize now that we do have rights. And they have started more to listen to us. You know, we are not all deaf, dumb and blind. If we have this sign, we put them up. The Women's Committee, we went around in the bathrooms and put up the signs. It was from the election period, back in November. They had these signs, and it was just a woman with no mouth. Did you ever see it?

H No.

E It was fantastic. When I seen it, I said, "Oh, I love this."

H Was it from within the union?

E Yes, it was a UAW. They sent them to us, and we put them up through the plant. And I said, "You know what, this is what the men wanted us to be like. Not be able to speak or nothing." But now they are starting to come out of that. That made them feel real bad when they seen that picture. I guess it sort of, the

lightbulb went off on some of them. There was one hanging up in the bathroom, you know. It was there a couple of weeks ago.

H: So do you think that there is more support from the national for women?

E: Yeah. Yeah, because there are more women getting national appointments. There is a woman, Audre Terrell, she is up in Detroit, she is over the Women's Department up in Detroit, and she is dynamite. She is one of the women I met at the conference and when we felt like we were being discriminated against on the Election Committee, I called her.

H: And she gave you support?

E: Yes.

H: Is there a channel that you can go through to the national when you are confronting problems at your local?

E: Yes, you are supposed to go through protocol. They are not women, though. See, the protocol said we were supposed to go through one guy named Bob Wickline, at the regional. Well, we went to see Anna Biggins first, because she was from our local. Our representative is Bob Wickline, so we went to him. But we did not get satisfaction from him. So then we had to go further, which I cannot talk about, because now Bob Wickline is on my shit list. To me, he did not do right, because he was with the opposition, too. He was on their side. So, I am going to have to see what I can do about him, too. What he did was wrong.

H: He was biased towards the others?

E: Yes, and he should not have been.

H: How has your union encouraged political activism among its female members?

E: They have no activism.

H: The local has not?

E: The local, they just want us to get out there and be, how do you say, active in a political right. But they do not really tell us what to do.

H: So they let you go on your own?

E: Yes.

H They do not stifle you, then?

E No

H How has your union's attitude toward women changed since you joined?

E It is still about the same

H What is that?

E We are doing better.

H It is getting better?

E Yeah, it gets a little bit better. It depends on, you know, what woman you are talking to within the union. Every woman has their own, you know, aspects of things.

H How is the union responsive toward women?

E It depends on what things that they are doing.

H I mean, do you think it still like the Good Ole Boy network?

E Some parts are.

H Like how?

E Some parts definitely are. But it will be changing, with the new president. I love him because he does not feel that way. He does not feel that way. And I do not think he will let anyone else be like that.

H So you think it all depends upon the administration within the local union and how women are treated?

E Right, because, you know, the way Tony is, he tells people what to do, and they go by what he does. And Jimmy is a completely different person from him. Things are going to be a lot better. It is going to be a lot better for women, period.

H Did he win by an overwhelming amount?

E Oh, he won by 1300 votes. Yeah. By 1300 votes. He is a very strong man. He

does not discriminate and, you know, he does not discriminate regardless of race or your sex or your gender. He is Greek and he likes people of all races level. He is a very open-minded person. If he could do it for you, he will tell you. If he cannot, he will not tell you no.

H: And the others were different?

E: Yeah. He will say he will see what he can do. And he will come back and let you go. Now, he is not perfect. He does forget, he has done that. He has that one-on-one contact with you, you know, and he has that charisma about himself where you know it is not sexual harassment. He will come up to you and, you know, he just puts that hand on you just to console you. And he will come up to me, and I was sitting here and I was reading, and he will come up to me, and I will have my hand out and he will say, "What is wrong?" And he just put his arm on my shoulder. And I just told him, I said, "Jimmy, something is not right here." And he just will give you that little push to make you want to do whatever you got to do. And he said, "Well, I trust you." He said, "I know you are going to do what is right." You know, he said, "Just keep on doing what you are doing." But, he has that one-on-one contact. And the women just melt. [Laughter] They just melt, you know. All the women in that plant, they love him. They love him. You will not find one woman that will not do whatever he asks them to do. He is not going to go and ask you to do something that is way out of line. He has, you know, morals.

H: Getting back to when you said that there were some women within the union structure that undermine their fellow women. How so?

E: That is one of those suits that Lisa was talking about that you cannot talk of because they would go to the outside if they had to. But one of the things -- I do not know if that is in the suit or not -- but I was just told about how when they were campaigning -- this was Lisa, too -- when she campaigned, she totally degraded the women when she went around and sat on men's laps and was just squirming on their lap to get a rise out of them to get that vote. You do not do that.

H: So they use their body?

E: Yeah.

H: Is that a small problem, do you think?

E: It is only a few who do that. It is very few. And all you have to do is carry yourself right. Have some respect for yourself and have some for the next.

person. And treat people the way, you know, you want to be treated. You can get all the respect in the world you want out there. You get respect when you give respect.

H: How did other women respond?

E: When they did that? Oh, they were pissed. I was one of them. When I heard about it, I was highly upset.

H: Do you confront the other woman?

E: She has been confronted.

H: By other women?

E: By other women. They told me. We were at Jimmy's victory party and she was confronted by the women and the men. And they told her to her face. They told her, "You know, you have just set women back 30 years?"

H: What did she do?

E: She does not think anything of it. She still flounces her butt around there and taking claim on men that were married, that are married. And then she is telling people, "Leave him alone, he is mine." Excuse me, nobody wants him.

H: So they play a lot.

E: They play a lot of these games.

H: Do they use sex? Do you know of women who have done that to better themselves in the union?

E: Yes.

H: Do you think that is still a problem?

E: Yes. [Laughter] I hate to say that. Yeah, it is. It is a problem. And I hate it.

H: Can you think of, without getting into too many details, specific instances? Without naming names.

E: Well, I have heard of instances, and every time when I ask someone about them, they always say they see them together, but they never see them in a hotel or a

motel or whatever. And I know, like, when we go on those different conferences and stuff, everyone has their own room. Then when they get up there, there are some who share a room. I mean, there are guys that will go to the men's room. Sometimes they will play tricks on you. They will send somebody to your room. Like, if I am in a room by myself, they will send somebody up there to your room. I do not open up my door once I go in. I will go visit one of my other union sisters. We will go sit down in the lounge and have a drink together or something. Then we go back to the room. But, they do play those games and I know for a fact, I heard them making reservations on the phone at our work center. Yeah, they made reservations to go to their own hotel room, they ordered a room with a jacuzzi. I was just pissed and went and found out if our local was paying for that.

H Did you find out?

E Yeah, they said they have a budget that they go by. When they make the reservations, anything over that, they best pull out their check book, pull out their own cash or charge or whatever. Our local will not pay for that. The secretaries at our union hall, they take care of making reservations and stuff. So they had to pay for that theirself.

H So, they probably know the in's and out's, too.

E The secretaries will make the reservation for them, but they will not pay for it.

H But, I mean, they probably know the inner trappings of what is going on.

E Oh, the secretaries know. But some of them get mixed up, because they are known to date the people they work with. The secretaries are a local of their own.

H Oh, they are not part of your union?

E They are not a part of our union. They have their own.

H But there is a lot of dating within the union, and you feel that that is a problem?

E It is not a problem, as long as they handle it right.

H. But they do not handle it right?

E When it gets blown out of proportion and when they disrespect their family values, their home, you know, when they are married and stuff, I do not

appreciate that

H But do you think that that is still a problem?

E Yes

H How is it dealt with, or is it?

E Some of the people can be very crooked, okay? Like this one guy, he was going with a girl out there to the plant, and some people -- you never know who is doing it -- but they will call your home and let your wife know. And then all hell breaks loose. That is what I mean. They should not be doing that. You do not disrespect your family. That is a problem.

H Is that one way that it is dealt with. If there is a woman having an affair, will somebody on the sly call and bust them?

E They usually wake up. But it is after they have been passed along through everybody. That is when they wake up. But then they have a reputation, that nobody wants to be bothered with them again. And then that makes it look bad for all the other women.

H So that is a problem that is still going on?

E There is a few, yeah. There is a few.

H How do you think that can be resolved?

E I do not know if it ever will be. There is always going to be some that is going to be naive and gullible, that is going to do it because the men go up and feed them, telling them what they are going to do for them and stuff, and they are not going to do nothing. They are just telling them that so that they can get their butts in bed, and those women fall for it.

H Will the union get one elected to a position because they like getting women like that in there?

E They are told what to do, and then they do it. But the women do not usually get that far up. They only let them go so far.

H It must make it difficult for legitimate women.

E Yeah, well, they try to, but we end up knowing. We know how they do. As long

as the other women, we know what those women are doing, we do not tolerate that

H How do you not tolerate it?

E We tell them We tell them to their face Yeah

H And then what do they do?

E After a while, they come around, then they wake up They wake up It should not go to that They should not have to degrade themselves They really should not But we just let them know that, you know, we will be there for them, regardless That is all that being a sister is You know, it is still you and your sister, and you are going to take up for her You just have to take up for her.

H What problems do women face in your union that men do not experience?

E Oh, there is sexual harassment Men get sexually harassed in there, too, but not like the women The men do not get passed along like the women do

H How well do women get along with each other in the union?

E Oh, well, we carry ourselves a little bit better now than what we used to We get along, but we still know which women we can trust and which women we cannot. And the women we can trust, we stick together The women that all feel the same, we have the same morals and the same values, we all stick together But the women who do not, you know, we treat them nice, but just with a long-handled spoon Let me just put it to you like that We treat them with respect, but they know not to cross that line

H. Is there factions within the union?

E They know how far to go It is only a few One day last week, I was coming out of the restroom and this other lady -- now, men are speaking and she has voted for me I support her when she is right, and she supports me when I am right But right now, we are at odds, because the president that won is not the president that she wanted to win So she was walking in and I was walking in She says, "Hello, trouble " And I just looked at her, I said, "Oh, I see you know my name " [Laughter] And she said, "Yeah, that is because that is my name, too " I said, "But you do not stir trouble like I stir trouble " And we kept on going, but we alright, because they will not go no further than that because if they do, they know we can get violent if we have to But I try not to go that way

H: Have there been instances of violence?

E: Not with me. I have had one instance where I stopped them. I stopped two girls from fighting. I felt like I had to do that because I did not want to see them lose their jobs.

H: Was it over a union issues, or personal?

E: I think it was over the job. It was stupid. This was right when I was first starting to get active with the union. And I was walking past, coming from the restroom, and I just heard the voices hollering and stuff first. And I turned around and I looked in back of me to see who was coming, you know. I did not want them to get in trouble. And I seen one of the general foremen walking up the alley. Next thing I knew, the fists started flying. And I ran over there and I grabbed one and threw her away from the other and I stood in between them and I said, "You two crazy fools. What is wrong with you all?" I said, "Do you see who is coming up the aisle? I do not care what you all do, but whatever you do, do not do it in here." I said, "You could lose your job, okay? If you are going to do it, take it outside. Wait until the shift is over with. You can take it out to the parking lot, for all I care, but do not be stupid and lose your job." And then they looked and they seen who was coming and one of the girls came up to me later and she thanked me.

H: Yeah, you did her a service.

E: Yeah. [Laughter]

H: What are the positive in-roads that your union has made for women workers?

E: It made roads for women to be able to get appointed jobs because, at first, there were no women appointed jobs. All of the women worked the line, you know, and when they first went out there, women did not even have restrooms. There was no restrooms for women, because there was no women hired. So they had to build restrooms for the women and stuff. The Women's Committee, we fought to get those commode seat covers for women for personal hygiene. They were making us pay for all our female needs and stuff. You know, we should not have to do that, we fought for that and they gave it to us. We do not have to pay for it anymore, they are in a machine, and they just leave the machine open.

H: So that was some of the issues the Women's Committee dealt with.

E: Yeah, right.

- H Have you ever encountered problems of equal work for equal pay?
- E No
- H When you said about the women getting into other jobs, was there a back lash from the men? Have you ever witnessed that?
- E No The way the contract is set up -- everything it set up on seniority -- there was really nothing we could do, so we have to just sit back and wait until some of the people retire That is out of our hands
- H So the men do not show any kind of resentment towards the women?
- E No As a matter of fact, the majority of the men feel sorry for them They want us to be able to go They say they feel like that is right, too But the way the contract is set up, there is nothing we can do until that seniority starts coming higher
- H How has your union worked to educate you of your rights?
- E Oh, they have done good That is why they send us to the seminars They have an education department up at Black Lake Right now, we are trying to get more women to be able to go You can go up on your own. You can take a vacation and you can take your whole family and go up to Black Lake and you can learn everything you need to know
- H That is in Michigan, correct?
- E Yeah But the Women's Committee sends one woman every year We are working on trying to get two women to go every year, every summer The route you have to take to go up there is country It is a long drive for a women by herself Every woman that has ever drove up there told me they did not like that drive because it is those back woods and stuff that you have got to go through by yourself If anything happened to your car, you never know what is going to happen to you You might come up missing So we are fighting to get two women to go
- H What has been the most positive experience, as a woman, with your union?
- E The most positive experience was to see Anna Biggins get inducted into the Ohio Hall of Fame. That was very positive It was great We was all in tears That was fantastic

H: What has been the most negative?

E: The most negative would be the parts that I am going through now with the Election Committee and the way they, you know, just totally discriminated against the women and the way they run politics out there. They run things their way and just because it is their way, it is supposed to be right and nobody has ever bucked the system. That was very negative.

H: What kind of union activities have you attended or participated in?

E: Well, we went to see Hillary Clinton. Our union, regionals sent a bus down for the retirees, and they called me. That was really nice. They called me from out to the union hall and asked me if I would be willing to go. It was free. Our union paid for everything.

H: Did you go to Washington?

E: No, we went to Cleveland. She was up in Cleveland. The only thing we had to do was meet up to the union hall. I was more than glad to go. We went to different rallies. Every election period, they always send us to things. We went to one, it was up in Cleveland.

H: It was not Dukakis, was it?

E: Yes.

H: I went. I was there.

E: You was there, too? And they bought us all tee shirts and we had our signs and stuff. I go to all of them. They call me and they say, "Bus to go." I say, "Yes, I am there."

H: How has the role of women changed where you work?

E: Well, it is better. At first when I went in there, they were expecting the women to do some of those real heavy jobs. One time the foreman came over to me and told me he wanted me to lift up this seat -- you know, the actual seats that are in the cars. It was on, like, a carrier and it was coming down and it sopped. This was a seat, not for a car, for a van. He wanted me to lift up that seat and put it in that van. And I looked at him and I said, "Are you a whole fool?" And he looked at me, he said, "No, I am giving you a direct order." He said, "I want you to lift up that seat and put it in that van." I said, "Let me tell you something. I do not care if you take me and throw me out. Do not ask me to do nothing you would not

have your mother do " I said, "Now, would you have your mother lift up that seat and put it in that van?" And he said, "No " I said, "Well, show me the same respect, because I am not doing it " And I did not do it He left me alone after that It was just some of the things they expected us to do that there was no way in the world a woman could do that. I know one woman -- the girl that is the sweeper now -- they wanted her to hang tires

H Are there not regulations within the plant?

E: No No, but they just need to use common sense They do not have to have regulations, just common sense will tell you a woman cannot hang tires all day long You cannot lift up 20, 30 pound tires for ten hours No And there was no way in the world I could have lifted up a 50 pound seat for ten hours

H How does management act towards women?

E They are better Management went through a course because they sat down with the union and they realized that they were doing wrong They realized they were pretty hard on them So they call them off-sights, and they sent them there and they got, I guess, retraining they call it Some of the foremen really started implementing what they learned, so it got better because we started speaking up, saying "No, you cannot expect us anymore It is going to cost you more money because your health rates is going to go up because we are going to be sick " So they came to their senses

H What is your definition of middle and working class, and where do you fall?

E I fall in the working class and that is where I feel like I fall -- middle working class Both categories, really That is because both me and my husband are working at the same place, where we can make a decent living

H Have you ever filed any grievances? If so, what for?

E: Yeah, I filed a grievance against my foreman because he was discriminating against me We had a seven-man relief cycle, where they were relieving people You get a break and stuff You just go to the restroom or go visit somebody Everybody within that relief, those seven people had to learn all seven jobs And then you take turns every day and you would relieve all seven people And you would get a break -- like, the first hour, you do not do a job, and the last hour you would be off the line, too Those are your breaks But you give everybody else, like a half hour break in the morning and a half hour in the afternoon So when I first came into that group, I wanted to learn it And there was another guy there - - he was a younger guy with less seniority than me -- and he decided he wanted

to get in the relief cycle, too. So I asked first, but the foreman would come and get him and let him off the line to go learn the jobs. He was not taking me off, so I filed a grievance for that. That was right before contract time. They brought the plant superintendent down, along with the committeeman and him, and we sat down and talked about it. The plant superintendent told him he was wrong, and the grievance never went no further. He agreed to let me off the line to learn the job.

H: And he did not get back

E: Oh, he tried, but the only thing I did was cuss him out

H: What activities have you engaged in to support other unions?

E: Oh, Superior Beverage, we rallied for them. They ended up getting their jobs back. They wanted to bring scabs in, and they did not. I think they had some in there, but they could not ever get them out. Did you see that in the news, when they turned over that car and stuff? I had just left there then. I was glad I was not there. After the child with the car, my nerves was kind of like shook, so I told her it was time for me to go.

H: Have you participated in other strikes?

E: The strike out to the plant? Well, we had the walk-out. The very first time they had the walk-out, I did not have my 90 days in, so I could not walk. It sort of scared me, you know? The union told me not to walk because I did not have my 90 days in and I could get fired. So there was some more people in there that did not walk with me and they told me, they said, "Be careful on your way out because a lot of these people, they did not understand. Some of them might get up in your face when you go to walk out this door." That part scared me, because I was young, naive and gullible. I did not realize the dangers and stuff I said, "Okay." So, when I got ready to walk out, I just took my keys, and I put one key in between each finger. We all walked out together. We went to one car, and the one car just dropped everybody else off at their cars.

H: Was there a problem?

E: No. They said a few things, a few words passed back and forth. But that was it. After they found out that we were still on 90 days and that we had families and we needed that job, then they left us alone. We did not go back to work that next day, but we could not walk out. It was not a violation not to go back in, but you could not walk out, because they was on strike. We could not cross the picket lines.

H What are the major problems confronting your union in 1997?

E The major problems? One was resolved, and they said we will be giving them a call. There is supposed to be a new car that is coming out to Lordstown. So we got that. There is one more problem and I am just hoping that it comes through. They are working on building a paint shop. See, the way our paint shop is set up now is up on the second floor. It has to come down to the first floor because of OSHA. OSHA says that the paint department is detrimental to everybody's health that is in there, which it is true. If lightning strikes, it can kill everybody in there. There are some powerful chemicals and stuff in there. So they want General Motors to put the paint department down on the first floor. So as long as that happens, our jobs are secure.

H What are the major road blocks that women face in the union?

E The major road block would be the seniority, our seniority, because we just do not have the seniority to get some of the good jobs that those guys have. I do not know if I would like to be a sweeper, because I would not like to be out there all those hours. But they make good money, because of all those hours they be out there.

H Over time and stuff.

E Yeah.

H What about within the union itself, the structure of the union?

E I do not think there are any roadblocks to stop us from going in. There are women that are presidents. There is a woman right up on the other side of Cleveland, she was president of her local.

H Oh, really?

E Yeah, I met her last year. She was at conference. There is not that many women at her plant and the men voted her in. Really, there are no road blocks, it is just we have to find somebody that is qualified to do it, that is all.

H What are your future aspirations for yourself within your union?

E Well, that depends on Jimmy, our president, and my family. Because I have been classified as a want-to-be attorney. [Laughter] If I have been classified as a want-to-be attorney, I am going to sit down and read the book backwards and forwards if I have to. I would really love to be a representative in another city.

Just out of Youngstown

H. I forgot to touch on CLUW. You said there is no CLUW?

E There is no CLUW There is no chapter in our local as of now But we do plan on having one because we are going to our president and ask him

H Have you ever participated in CLUW outside of the union? Have you ever gone to meetings?

E CLUW was a conference I went to, they participated in our conference, and it was a long time ago They were trying to get me to join it then but right then, I could not squeeze it into my schedule

H So you could join now, but you just do not have a local at your local?

E Even if they might have a CLUW There is some members there But our president will not give the women time out of the plant to go to the union hall They will not let CLUW have meetings over there, and that is what we would need We would need to be able to have days off where we could all meet over at the union hall.

H That was the old president How are you going to address it with the new one?

E I am just going to go to him and ask him for it [Laughter] I was always told if you want something, ask for it I have been told no lots of times in my life. One more time will not hurt me. It will not hurt me

H Is there anything else you would like to add?

E I think you might find a lot more out after we find out about this case, because a few people might be in jail Especially if this election does not turn out the way that it should, because there are some people that are starting to doubt the things that happen in the election How did it happen? So if they start questioning it, some people could go to jail

H Thank you

End of Interview